The Importance of Questioning

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Students gain a wealth of knowledge through asking questions beginning when they are small, and continuing as they get older. Children begin by asking “what’s that” or similar questions to learn about different objects and animals when they are young. Questioning is also important in comprehension when children get into elementary school and begin to read. Questioning can be used in the classroom to help build comprehension and understand what they are reading. Adults still ask questions when reading for research or reading the daily newspaper. It helps to better understand what the author is saying in the text. Questioning is important for understanding and is one of the steps to comprehension that is used in the classroom.

Good questions should be able to reflect knowledge from the text that the students have been studying. Students that ask questions will be better readers and able to comprehend what they are reading. Applegate, Quinn and Applegate (2006) discussed the different types of thinkers because everyone can answer questions differently. They have classified eight different types of thinkers when it comes to answering questions. The different types of thinkers are “literalist, fuzzy thinkers, left fielders, quiz contestants, politicians, dodgers, authors, and minimalists” (p. 49). Some students struggle with answering questions regarding what they read. One of the types is the “left fielders.” These responses will be off topic or not related to the text. They are unable to make connections when reading the text. These readers struggle with answering questions on their own regarding the story. After discussion and think alouds they are more able to talk about the text and make some connections. Another type of reader is the “politician” and these are the readers that respond with an answer that the teacher is looking for. They respond like a politician when running for an election. They tell you what you want to hear. The “politician” type of readers are able to respond better after small group discussions or after the teacher models the project (Applegate, Quinn & Applegate, 2006). Readers vary and teachers need different questioning strategies for the student to be able to comprehend the story to the fullest. Using the different types of readers information and matching readers up to their style teachers, will be able to determine the intervention that will be the most successful for the student.

It is important to involve discussion and group work in the classroom to let the students work together to answer questions regarding the reading. By working together they are able to talk about what they understand from the reading and share their thoughts with other members of the class. Researchers (Applegate, Quinn & Applegate, 2006) discussed the importance of using critical thinking questions and involving the students in discussion to expand their knowledge. The questions require explanation about why they came to that conclusion about the story. When the students are involved in answering and discussing they will be more likely to read more on their own. Questions that require students to infer and don’t have a single correct answer require the students to engage in discussion about the best answer based on what they read. This encourages interaction and peer discussion to determine the important parts of the text.

Another strategy that can be used in the classroom is to involve the students in discussion and to make questioning a concrete way to learn. The students can use a chart and sticky notes write down their “I wonder” questions when reading the story. Students can write down the questions they may have before, during, and after the story. They are able to record the answer and continue reading (Gregory and Cahill, 2010). By making this an active part of their learning routine, the students will begin to ask questions automatically when reading. By using the “I wonder” strategy the students can make connections and find meaning based on what they read in the text (Gregory and Cahill, 2010).

Question and answer relationships are another strategy that can be used to practice questioning skills when reading. Question and answer relationships clarify the relationships between the text and the question when an answer is formed (Cortese, 2003). Cortese developed three levels of questioning. One level is the “textually explicit” which is where the answer can be generated from the text. Another step is the “textually implicit” which requires some inferencing to answer the question using the text. The last level is “scriptually implicit” where the answer uses knowledge from the text but it is a more reasoned answer (Cortest, 2003). This strategy teaches students to reflect on what they read and use prior knowledge to construct an answer to questions. Researcher (Cortese, 2003) also applies the question and answer relationship strategy to pictures. By using pictures students can determine the cause and effect and the main idea. Question and answer relationships with questions can be used to help a student to recognize details and use inferencing to determine the concept of the picture. This strategy can be used for students who struggle with text and comprehension skills.

When using the question and answer relationship strategy with pictures there are some strategy that can be used. One strategy is the “right there” strategy where the answer is right there in the picture. Another strategy is the “putting it together” where the student must look at a different picture and put information together to form an answer. In the “on my own” strategy the student must incorporate prior knowledge to form an answer (Cortese, 2003). These are some good strategies to apply with pictures to build the skills that will help answer questions based on text.

Teachers can use questioning as a way to see how students comprehend the literacy lesson. Evaluating students to see how they are doing is important to make sure all the students are at the same level. This will provide the teacher with insight into whether the students may need extra assistance in a certain topic. Teachers can use questions to help students to be able to recall facts from the text. Questioning is part of recalling and repetition that can be used to help assess students comprehension. (Applegate, Quinn, Applegate, 2006)

It is important to model questioning strategies for comprehension while reading in the classroom can help students understand and use questioning in their everyday lives. Through modeling and repetition the students are more likely to stop and ask themselves questions throughout the reading. When reading in the classroom the teacher can post questions on the board to model questioning skills for the students. Parker and Hurry (2007) used think alouds in addition to the modeling in the classroom. Think alouds are a good opportunity for students to work together and discuss the story with their peers. These strategies are most effective when used with direct instruction in the classroom.

It is important to value every question and make the student feel like they are having an impact on what they are learning in the classroom. The students can pick the important parts that they want to discuss in more detail. This also can involve class discussion to come up with some answers to the questions. Students also can have the materials needed to make questioning an active part of their learning experience. The format for instruction is important to keep consistent throughout the teaching. Assessment is another part of questioning that is an important aspect to consider. Questioning as a whole can be implemented to make it a part of their everyday reading process.

References

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